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The identity of certain early Australian types referred to the Cuculidae

by I. J. Mason

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1788 and 1794 several artists were employed to illustrate natural history subjects at the first settlement of Port Jackson at Sydney Cove. Contrary to Mathews' statement (1911: 16), most of the drawings were of material from the environs of Port Jackson, the rest certainly from Australia (Hindwood 1970). In one set, now known as the 'Watling' drawings, 295 birds were depicted. Only some are signed by Watling, the rest appearing to be the work of unknown artists.

Some of these drawings were used as types by Latham (1801 b). His plates were copies of either the 'Watling' drawings or another set called the 'Lambert' drawings. It is not known from which set Latham derived his descriptions, but it is irrelevant as the Lambert drawings were also copied from the 'Watling' drawings (cf. Hindwood 1970: 19). The 'Watling' drawings therefore, should be considered the types of Latham's descriptions (cf. Schodde & Mason 1980). One of these, the Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus*

flabelliformis (Latham 1801 b) was formerly regarded as an earlier name for *Cuculus pyrrhophanus* (Vieillot 1817). Subsequent misinterpretation and confusion has left the identity of the binomial *Cacomantis flabelliformis* in doubt.

I will show that *flabelliformis* is the earliest valid name for the species currently known as *Cuculus pyrrhophanus* and that its type is the 'Watling' drawing No. 75. In addition I will discuss two of its synonyms, *rubricata* (Latham 1801 b) and *rufulus* (Vieillot 1817). To provide perspective I retraced the events culminating in the present doubt on the validity of these names. I have examined Latham's and Vieillot's type descriptions, the 'Watling' drawings in question, and an adequate series of specimens from Australia of both adult and immature Fan-tailed Cuckoos *Cacomantis flabelliformis* and Brush Cuckoos *Cacomantis variolosus* (Vigors & Horsfield 1827).

DISCUSSION

Cuculus flabelliformis Latham, 1801, Index Orn. Suppl. p. 30.

A number of the discussions on *flabelliformis* reported here do not relate to the 'Watling' drawing (No. 75) *per se* but to Latham's (1801 a, b) descriptions and plate. However, it is not Latham's descriptions and plate but the identity of the type, the original 'Watling' drawing, that is in question.

The identity of *flabelliformis* was first questioned by North (1906: 53) who concluded that Latham's latinized description of the "Fan-tailed Cuckoo" (1801 b), derived from his English description (1801 a), was erroneously applied by Latham to *flabelliformis*. North further stated that Latham's (1801 a) description of *flabelliformis*—especially that of the tail—which agreed with his plate (cxxvi), did "not apply to the *Cacomantis flabelliformis* of the 'Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum (Shelley 1891)' and writers in general". It was therefore North's opinion that the description Latham had applied to *flabelliformis* best fitted the Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*, to which species the name should be applied. Mathews (1911: 16) commented that Sharpe (1906: 121) accepted the 'Watling' drawing as that of a Fan-tailed Cuckoo but had pointed out many inaccuracies, and Mathews went on to say that the figure reproduced by Latham (1801 a) in his General Synopsis, showing a black throat band, could not be identified with any Australian cuckoo. He considered it indeterminable and even "extra-Australian". In his 1919 account Mathews continued to cast doubt on the use of *flabelliformis* for the Fan-tailed Cuckoo. Hartert (1925: 172) agreed with North and Mathews, that Latham's description "must have been a fanciful picture, as no such bird is yet known to exist. Latham's "Fan-tailed Cuckoo" is above brownish brown (*sic*), underneath orange, with a broad black collar across the jugulum".

Neither North nor Hartert saw the original 'Watling' drawing upon which Latham based his description, and therefore may be excused for their conclusions. Mathews (1911), however, had seen it, but when referring to *flabelliformis* as indeterminable he was not referring to the original drawing but instead to the plate in Latham's General Synopsis (1801 a), in which there are inaccuracies. It can thus be presumed that Mathews considered Latham's (1801 a) plate as the type. Moreover, his statement that Sharpe (1906) had noted inaccuracies in the illustration is erroneous. Sharpe made no such comment but instead simply referred Latham's descriptions and plate to the 'Watling' drawing, and stated that Latham's plate represents a

bird with a deeper red colour underneath and that the 'Watling' drawing may have faded.

Recently Hindwood (1970: 26) analysed the 'Watling' drawing: "Although the figure shows a dark neck-band there can be little doubt from the tail pattern, the white on the wing-shoulder and eye-ring, that it was intended to represent the Fan-tailed Cuckoo". Hindwood concluded that Latham's plate—"is based on either this painting or on Lambert drawing No. 26 . . . which is a copy of Watling No. 75"—shows a further exaggeration of this neck band.

The original 'Watling' drawing is unsigned and of poorer quality than the drawings signed by Watling himself. Presumably the unknown artist drew this bird from a specimen, emphasising what he thought were its diagnostic characters and exaggerating some of them. The drawing is an artistic interpretation in the style of the time, probably executed by an unskilled artist with inadequate painting material. Given these speculations, the drawing certainly represents a Fan-tailed Cuckoo, probably an immature specimen.

There is no doubt that Latham's original (1801 b) description of *flabelliformis*, latinized from his General Synopsis (1801 a) and referred to as the "Fan-tailed Cuckoo", originated from 'Watling' drawing No. 75. Latham never saw a specimen of this species, as was the case with a number of other species he described. He used the 'Watling' or (Lambert) drawing as a basis for his plate and descriptions, but altered in his plate and description, perhaps unwittingly, a number of crucial characters. The original 'Watling' drawing differs from that of Latham's (1801 a, b) descriptions and plate in these ways: the brown crown and side of head is barred faintly, with no great demarcation between the side of the face and throat; the breast band is narrower, less pronounced, and is not black as in Latham's (1801 a) plate, but instead washed with a dark brown tone; the neck and sides of the breast are lighter rufous (washed dull yellow) which is presumably the artist's ploy to contrast the darker neck band; the tones on the breast and vent are further reduced to light cream-yellow. Resembling the portrayal in the 'Watling' drawing, specimens of moulting immature Fan-tailed Cuckoos can retain some of the finely barred dark brown dorsal plumage and also exhibit a somewhat *broad band of rufous on the breast* (Marchant & Höhn 1980 and pers. obs.), lighter rufous on throat and abdomen. In the 'Watling' drawing the pronounced eye-ring is illustrated as white. The base of the lower mandible is light, as appropriate to an immature bird.

The fanned attitude and diagnostic barring of the tail in the original 'Watling' drawing is further evidence that it depicts a Fan-tailed Cuckoo; the outermost rectrices are barred with complete alternating black and white bars on the inner webs to the feather shafts, and are edged white on the edges of the outer webs. The bars decrease in width on the inner webs towards the innermost remiges and the central pair are edged white. These characters are not portrayed fully in Latham's (1801 a) plate.

Sylvia rubricata Latham, 1801, Index Orn. Suppl. p. 55.

In the case of *Sylvia rubricata* Latham the identity of the bird painted by Watling is not in doubt, but whether Latham's (1801 b) description applies to that drawing requires clarification.

Mathews (1911: 16), in rejecting *flabelliformis* as indeterminable and not to be outdone by North (1906) in the usage of *Cuculus rufulus* Vieillot for the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, prepared a case to validate *Sylvia rubricata*. Watling's

drawing (No. 202), upon which Latham based *Sylvia rubricata*, is an accurate representation of a Fan-tailed Cuckoo and therefore would have been the next available name for this species. Mathews (1911) noted that Watling's drawings Nos. 202 and 203, are both inscribed as 'Ruddy Warbler', the latter portraying a female, and although Latham's (1801 a) description of the Ruddy Warbler in his General Synopsis was based on both drawings, he latinized only the description that applied solely to the Cuckoo (No. 202) in his Ind. Orn. Suppl. (1801 b). Drawing No. 203 portrays an *Eopsaltria australis* (cf. Sharpe 1906: 143). Mathews (1911) stated that "Latham's description is inaccurate only in the colour of the feet, which are given as "flavi", and which the figure shows as being dark.". Mathews (1912: 10-12) referred to his previous publication in regard to the validity of *rubricatus* and described two new subspecies, *Cuculus rubricatus athertoni* and *C.r. albani*. He continued to use *rubricatus* (Mathews 1919: 319-320) and described another subspecies, *Cacomantis rubricatus eyrei*. However, he commented that "the type painting is very good, but the feet are drawn wrong, as the artist was not an ornithologist".

Mathews (1922: 399-400), apparently influenced by suggestions from the Checklist Committee of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, reversed his decision on the validity of *rubricatus* for the Fan-tailed Cuckoo. Acting on advice from this Committee that "the description given by Latham of his Ruddy Warbler did not agree with the cuckoo", Mathews (1922) reviewed the matter and decided that the drawing of the cuckoo which Latham himself recognised as his Ruddy-Warbler could not have been the one upon which Latham's description was based. He repeated both Latham's English and latinized descriptions (1801 a, b), drawing attention to the passage—"... the plumage above brownish ash colour: beneath wholly ferruginous, inclining to yellow . . . [Latham]", concluding that it did not fit the drawing from which it was said to have been derived. Mathews (1922) was of the opinion that "... as the upper surface is bluish-grey and the under-surface is pinkish-red, without any inclination to yellow, and the tail shows the white markings of the cuckoo; . . . there can be no hesitation in rejecting the description of the Ruddy-Warbler as referring to that painting, notwithstanding Latham's note".

Although Hartert (1925: 172) overlooked Mathews' (1922) publication, he had corresponded with Mathews and was aware that Mathews no longer used the name *rubricatus*. On the basis of that understanding Hartert (1925) quoted part of Latham's (1801 a) description, and then stated that it did not agree with Watling's drawing No. 202 which represents a *Cacomantis* but is inscribed as Latham's *Sylvia rubricata*.

As previously stated by Mathews (1911) Watling's 2 drawings Nos. 202 and 203, are inscribed as 'Ruddy Warbler'. Although Latham may have thought that these 2 drawings could have been of the same species—as marked on the originals—he did not commit himself. His original English description (1801 a: 249(34)) is based only on Watling's drawing No. 202 and fits it extremely well (*pace* Mathews 1922, Hartert 1925). Latham's (1801 b) latinized account refers only to that description. In fact the bird in Watling's drawing No. 202 is ash-grey dorsally; reddish-brown (rust-coloured) inclining to yellow ventrally—not pinkish-red as stated by Mathews (1922); flight feathers and tail brown, and feet dull cream brown.

Thus Mathews' (1911) comment that Latham's (1801 a) original English description of the Ruddy Warbler was based on Watling's drawings Nos. 202 and 203 is unfounded. Latham (1801 a) described Watling's drawing No. 203 separately, under the name Gold-bellied Warbler (249: 33) and did not refer to or include this description in his 1801 b publication. Mathews (1911) may have been confused, in that on page 249, the description of the 'Ruddy Warbler' (No. 34) was followed by the 'Chaste Warbler' (No. 35) with a comment that it was found with the last. However, as pointed out by Sharpe (1906: 143), the latter description referred to Watling drawing No. 200 (*Sylvia casta* Latham). In his 1823 account Latham aligned his descriptions of Watling's drawings with much more certainty on page 138:—170, Ruddy Warbler; 171, New-Holland Warbler "*Native name Thadaguan. Is a very common and domestic bird, with the actions of the Redbreast of Europe* (my italics); has many things in common with the last: probably the female [Latham 1823]"; 172, Chaste Warbler.

It is obvious in comparing these two accounts, of the Golden-bellied Warbler and the New-Holland Warbler, that they are both of Watling's drawing No. 203. These descriptions both fit this drawing, and also, the words in my italics in the description (Latham 1823) are inscribed on the original Watling drawing. Thus, this further confirms that the Ruddy Warbler and Golden-bellied/New-Holland Warbler were taken from 'Watling' drawings Nos. 202 and 203 respectively. There is no reason to suspect that the original inscriptions on these drawings were incorrect, as suggested by Hartert (1925). These inscriptions and all the others on the 'Watling' series are accurate in that they can be referred to any of Latham's descriptions in his 1801 a and b accounts.

Cuculus rufulus Vieillot, 1817, Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., Ser. 8: 234.

In discussing the validity of *flabelliformis*, North (1906) stated that if *Cuculus rufulus* Vieillot were applicable to the Fan-tailed Cuckoo it would be the next available name for this species. Mathews (1912) evaded the question of the identity of *rufulus* by justifying an earlier name, *rubricatus*, for the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, but later regarded *rufulus* as a synonym of *rubricatus* (Mathews 1919).

Hartert (1925: 172) was the first to dispute the application of *rufulus*, stating that Vieillot's description is of a young *Cacomantis*, probably *Cacomantis variolosus* and that the description is insufficient to form a definite conclusion. Hartert (1925: 169) disputed Pucheran's (1852) opinion that it was of a young *cineraceus* (= *flabelliformis*), stating that he judged it "from the description, as he expressly stated, and had not seen the type, which was not in the Paris Museum, but in the collection of M. Baillon". In turn, Mathews (1926: 54) stated that he was "not satisfied that this [Vieillot's description] does not fit the immature of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo only, and it cannot be mixed up with the Square-tailed Cuckoo. The immatures are so different, and as the type came from New South Wales we know to what form to look. Granted that there is some doubt . . .". In reply to this, Hartert (1926: 56) once again said that "*rufulus* is in my opinion most certainly too uncertain to adopt it for any form with absolute certainty".

After taking the previous discussions into account Amadon (1942) commented that "after studying Vieillot's description with a series of juvenals of both species" (*C. pyrrhophanus* = *flabelliformis* and *C. variolosus*) he

could not justify the restriction of the name to either. The sections of Vieillot's (1817) description that Amadon translated, e.g. (upper parts) "variées de brun et de roussatre", suggested that the description referred to the Brush Cuckoo rather than to the Fan-tailed Cuckoo. He went on to say that those who use this name (*rufulus*) for the Fan-tailed Cuckoo comment "that the remiges are ashy, the rectrices similar but darker and blackish" and concluded that this could refer to either. "The description of the belly, "le ventre de deux gris, l'un presque blanc et l'autre fonce . . .", might apply to many individuals of either species." He stated further that there were a number of other points of Vieillot's description that could fit either species—"not to mention other possibilities, if the locality should be wrong", deciding that it was impossible from Vieillot's description to identify *Cuculus rufulus*.

There is no reason to doubt that the two specimens Vieillot (1817) described under *Cuculus rufulus* originated from Australia, contrary to Amadon (1942). Pucheran (1852: 562), in discussing *rufulus*, commented: "This is another young individual like *C. cineraceus* . . ., this species is referred to *flabelliformis* by Latham". He obviously had no trouble in identifying *C. cineraceus* from this description contrary to Hartert's (1926) experience.

To be able to place Vieillot's description of *rufulus* in perspective it is necessary to describe the juveniles from Australia of both the Fan-tailed Cuckoo and the Brush Cuckoo (which, incidentally are quite dissimilar, contrary to Amadon (1942)), and compare them with a 'complete' translation of the description of the name in question. In discussing the uncertainty of *rufulus*, Amadon (1942) commented on disjointed pieces of this description, even omitting a critical sentence. However, the complete translation indicates *rufulus* is referable to a Fan-tailed Cuckoo.

(a) *Juvenile Fan-tailed Cuckoo*: dorsally generally dark brown, barred with alternating dull, finely patterned red-brown and darker grey-brown; ventrally, throat and breast is more mottled with grey browns, alternating with white and washed with russet on occasions; varying to a lighter and mottled belly and abdomen with various tones of greys—in some specimens almost white; remiges plain dark grey-brown, rectrices black edged and or barred russet (with a half bar pattern).

(b) *Juvenile Brush Cuckoo*: dorsally generally lighter in tone than Fan-tailed, boldly patterned with alternating dark grey-brown and lighter tones of russet; ventrally boldly patterned with pronounced alternating bars of dark grey-brown and white-washed light russet, in some specimens extending to the belly, but the belly itself and the abdomen are approaching white, the brown bars less intense; remiges mid brown-grey, rectrices darker grey-brown and approaching that of the Fan-tailed; both the rectrices and remiges are edged and barred russet (half bar pattern).

A translation of Vieillot's (1817) description is as follows (my italics): 'All the dorsal parts vary from brown to rufous-ish [russet], the throat and breast are of the last tint and very lightly spotted white; the underside of the two specimens grey, one almost white, the other darker; the remiges ashy, the rectrices like the remiges but tending towards blackish and having the sides tending towards russet [rufous] . . .'. In comparing this description with those of the previous 2 there is little doubt that the patterns and contrasting colours are more similar to those of the juvenile Fan-tailed Cuckoo and thus *rufulus* is best placed with its synonymy.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the previous evidence *flabelliformis* should be reinstated for the Fan-tailed Cuckoo not only because it is the earliest valid name but also for uniformity and stabilization of nomenclature as this was the accepted name in literature for this species until the publication of Peters (1940) and in the *Emu* until the 1950s, (cf. RAOU 1955) including the R.A.O.U. (1926) Checklist. I also retain the use of the genus *Cacomantis* contrary to Condon (1975) (cf. Schodde & Mason, in prep.).

The nominate subspecies of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo and its synonyms are as follows:

Cacomantis flabelliformis flabelliformis (Latham).

Cuculus flabelliformis Latham, 1801, Index. Orn. Suppl., p. 30 (Sydney area, New South Wales).

*Sylvia rubricata** Latham, 1801, Index. Orn. Suppl., p. 55 (Sydney area, New South Wales).

Cuculus rufulus Vieillot, 1817, N. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., n. ser. 8: 234 (Nouvelle-Hollande = Australia).

Cuculus prionurus Lichtenstein, 1823, Verz. Doubl. Zool. Mus. Berlin p. 9 (New South Wales).

Cuculus cineraceus Vigors & Horsfield, 1827, Trans. Linn. Soc. London, 15: 298 (Parramatta, New South Wales).

Cuculus incertus Vigors & Horsfield, 1827, Trans. Linn. Soc. London 15: 299 (Parramatta, New South Wales).

Cuculus rubricatus athertoni Mathews, 1912, Austral. Av. Rec. 1: 11 (Atherton, northern Queensland).

Cuculus rubricatus albani Mathews, 1912, Austral. Av. Rec. 1: 12 (Albany, Western Australia).

Cacomantis rubricatus eyrei Mathews, 1918, Birds Aust. 7: 320 (Eyre Peninsula South Australia).

*Now that *Sylvia rubricata* is placed within the synonymy of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo the next available name for the Rock Warbler is *Origma solitaria* (Lewin) (see also Mathews 1922).

Distribution. Eastern Australia from Cape York Peninsula south along the Great Dividing Range and its western foothills to Tasmania, coastal south-eastern South Australia to Eyre Peninsula and the southwestern sector of Western Australia.

Cuculus pyrrhophanus Vieillot is adequately discussed by Pucheran (1852), Hartert (1925: 174; 1926) and Amadon (1942: 15) and does not warrant further discussion. Thus *pyrrhophanus* now becomes restricted to the subspecies of *Cacomantis flabelliformis* that inhabits New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands.

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A new species of *Miraфра* (Alaudidae) and new races of the Somali Long-billed Lark *Miraфра somalica*, Thekla Lark *Galerida malabarica* and Malindi Pipit *Anthus melindae* from southern coastal Somalia

by P. R. Colston

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MIRAFRA ssp

Six specimens of a new lark were collected by Dr J. S. Ash 13 km north of Uarsciek (=Warsheikh), some 80 km NE of Mogadiscio, in southern Somalia on 9 and 10 July 1981. He found that they differed significantly from other members of the *Alaudidae* that he knew from his wide field experience in north Africa. A cursory glance through the literature (e.g.